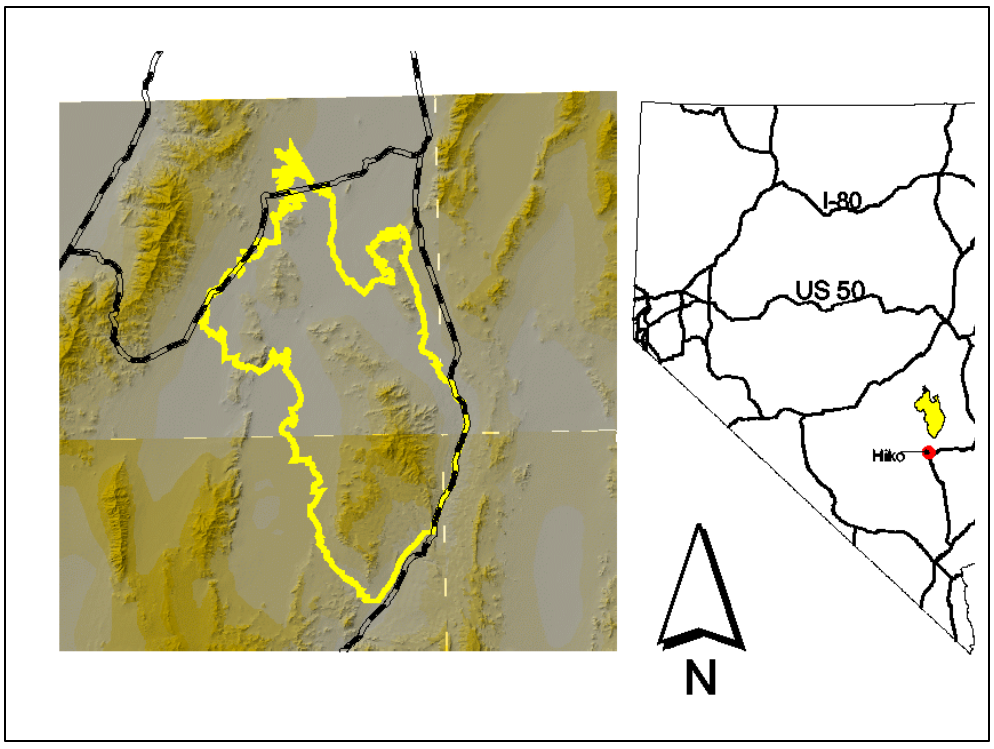
Seaman Herd Management Area
Nye and Lincoln Counties, Nevada

Location/Habitat

The Seaman Herd Management Area (HMA) is located in Nye and Lincoln counties, approximately 35 miles south of Lund and 70 miles southwest of Ely. The HMA encompasses approximately 338,400 acres and is currently being managed for wild horses by the Ely Field Office to maintain a viable healthy population of 159 horses.

The climate of the area is arid to semiarid. Annual average precipitation varies from 17 inches at the higher elevations to 7 inches or less at the lower elevations. The bulk of the precipitation occurs through early spring rains and winter snows. Temperatures range from summer maximums in excess of 100 degrees Fahrenheit to winter lows falling well below zero. The topography of the area consists of valley floors, alluvial fans, mountains, steep ridges, and basins. Elevations range from 5,000 feet in the valley bottoms to 8,650 feet on Timber Mountain in the Seaman Range.

Wild horses use the area on a yearlong basis. Their summer range encompasses the Seaman Range and the Grant Mountains to the west. Seaman wild horses winter in Coal Valley and the White River Valley. The horses prefer to graze the grasses and grass-like species found throughout the area and the winterfat flats located in the valley. But, they will utilize other shrubs and forbs when necessary.



The Seaman HMA is one of the drier areas within the Ely District. There are only a few natural springs and seeps, and even fewer man-made waters such as small earthen reservoirs in the HMA. All of these waters are small and provide only a limited supply of fresh water on most years. Most of these waters will dry up on drier years and animal emergencies may result in the emergency removal of wild horses.

This HMA sustains many public land uses. These uses include hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, firewood cutting, off-road vehicle touring, pine nut harvesting, livestock grazing and mining. Some of the major wildlife found in the HMA include: pronghorn ntelope, low densities of mule deer, mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes and kit foxes. Birds include sage grouse, numerous species of migratory song birds, bald eagles in certain locations during the winter, peregrine falcons in some mountain sites and ferruginous hawks. Smaller mammals include cottontail rabbits, badgers, black-tailed jackrabbits and several species of ground squirrels.

Vegetation

Major plant communities in the area are the pinyon-juniper woodland in the mountains and the salt desert shrub communities in the valleys. The salt desert shrub community is composed of two major vegetative zones: the shadscale and the sagebrush.

The pinyon-juniper zone is scattered throughout the area, and generally occurs above 6,000 feet within and surrounding the mountain ranges. Stands of these pinyon pine and juniper trees vary in density from scattered to closed (solid) stands. A few isolated and ancient ponderosa pine stands and several aspen groves dot the higher elevations. This zone provides summer range for wild horses and elk.

The shadscale zone is found mostly in the bottoms of the valleys. Plants have adapted to the very arid saline soils of the valleys. Important plants in this zone are shadscale, winterfat, black sagebrush and black greasewood. This zone serves as important winter range for wild horses, livestock, and a year-round population of pronghorn antelope.

The sagebrush zone is scattered throughout the area, and occurs between 5,500 feet and 7,000 feet where soils are less salty and more gravelly in nature. The big sagebrush zone provides an important source of perennial grasses and forbs from which the wildlife of the area derive a majority of their nutrition.

Herd Description

In order to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance, the Seaman HMA is gathered periodically to reduce the number of wild horses roaming the management area. The Seaman HMA was gathered for the first time in 1986. Between 1985 and 1999, a total of 266 wild horses had been removed from the Seaman HMA and placed into the BLM's National Wild Horse and Burro Adoption program.

Seaman wild horses are all descendants of ranch stock or horses lost by miners during the 1800s. Wild horses in the area possess a variety of colors with variations from white to black and all shades in

between. The Seaman herd contains a preponderance of sorrels and bays, as well as a high percentage of grays and roans. Buckskins, duns, blacks and whites can also be readily seen throughout the area, and an occasional pinto or palomino has also been captured.

Wild horse foals are generally born in the spring when new green grass is plentiful, but young can be found on the range during almost any season. Generally, wild horses are sound and healthy, having been subjected to the rigors of natural selection which sorted out only the toughest animals.

The herd is comprised of numerous smaller bands ranging in size from one animal (rare) to bands of more than twenty animals. Wild horses exhibit a fairly complex social structure. Typically a wild horses band will consist of one stallion and one to several mares with their offspring. Bands are stable family units, and commonly reunite after a wild horse gather, although they do interact and change members occasionally. The stud horse (stallion) will vigorously defend his mares against other studs through a complex series of gestures, body stances and physical combat. A young colt (a male) will generally stay in its family band until it reaches two to three years of age. It may then be driven out of the band by the dominant stud or will choose to leave the band to search for its own harem of mares. Often young studs will form bachelor bands. Bachelor bands are loose associations of young studs apparently formed to satisfy the need for social contact and mutual protection. Young studs may remain in bachelor bands until they mature enough to gain control over their own mares. Young studs will sometimes be tolerated by other bands but have low social status. Young fillies (females) will often stay in their family bands for longer periods of time than the colts, but they will eventually either wander off to seek a new band or will be actively taken by a different stud horse into a new band.